

The 1990 Reigate Coin Hoard

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with a report on the pottery containers by

CLIVE ORTON

Introduction

This large hoard of 6703 coins deposited in the mid-15th century was found by Mr Roger Mintey on the evening of 22 September 1990 while using a metal detector on land being developed for housing on the corner of Brokes Road and Pilgrims Way, Reigate (fig 1). This land was used as a school playing field in the ownership of Surrey County Council before being sold to Berkeley Homes for housing development. At the time of the hoard's discovery, preliminary work had begun on the construction of an estate of detached houses.

The hoard itself will form the subject of a detailed paper by Dr Barrie Cook (Cook forthcoming) and has already been illustrated in great detail in Glendining's catalogue of sale which contains historical and topographical background information by Mr D J Turner (1922). It will suffice to say that the latest coins in the hoard are a groat and a penny of the cross pellet issue (1454-60) of Henry VI and that on this evidence Dr Cook suggests a deposition date of 1454 or very soon afterwards. Such a date is remarkably similar to that of a previous hoard found not far away in 1972 (Bird & Turner 1974). The present report deals in more detail with archaeological aspects of this latest notable discovery and in particular with the two containers.

Circumstances of discovery

The field in which the hoard lay is situated on Gault Clay, on land which slopes gently down to the south from the foot of Colley Hill. Chalk was exposed in the north-west corner of the field during earthmoving. The findspot (TQ 250 511) lay within an area which had been terraced into the slope for a level house platform and it is clear that perhaps up to 0.5m of overburden had already been removed before the hoard's discovery. Mr Mintey, along with others, had already detected on this site on several previous occasions resulting, it is understood, in the recovery of mostly recent material. The exception, also found by Mr Mintey, was a single medieval coin (a halfpenny of Edward III, second coinage).

Upon receiving a signal suggesting a large buried object Mr Mintey, using a trowel, 'carefully prised away small blocks of clay and about ten inches (25cm) down ... came across what looked like a broken pink flower pot' (from Mr Mintey's statement to Surrey Constabulary) which he assumed was a land drain, one of which ran 15 feet (4.6m) to the west. Following his rapid realisation of the nature of his discovery the finder left the site, later returning in the dark with his father. After another hour's work, during which a considerable number of coins were removed, both men left the site. The finder then returned alone, leaving again at 10.30pm having recovered, as he thought, all but a few of the coins. The following morning Mr Mintey returned to the site with the intention of recovering the remaining few coins and alerting the police. However, it rapidly became clear that there was a second, green, pot also filled with coins, which Mr Mintey also recovered. The police were then called and efforts were made by the finder to inform local archaeologists. The site was then visited by Mr D J Turner who was present for much of the following afternoon. The site was finally vacated about 7.40pm by which time the depth of the hole had reached about

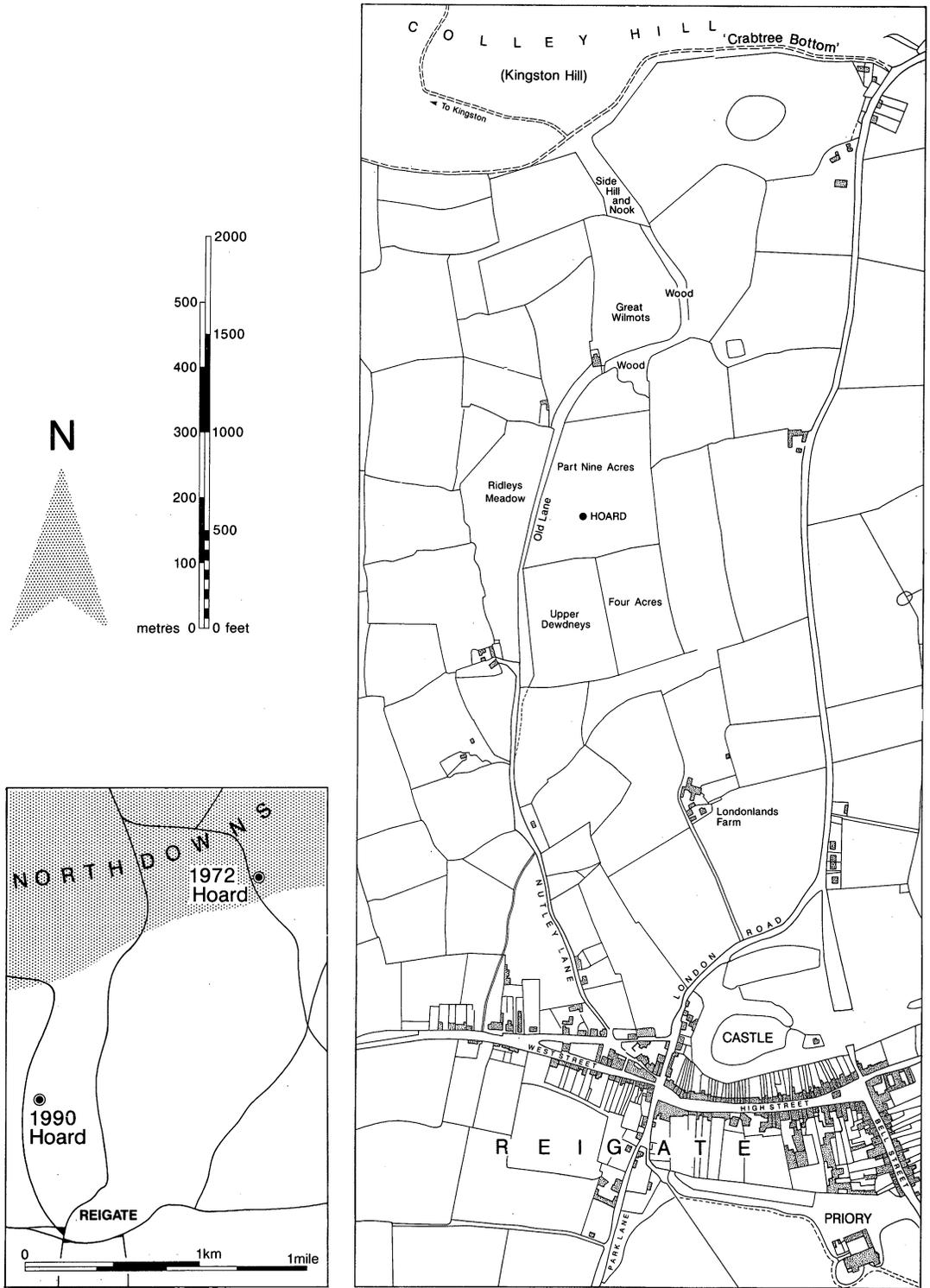


Fig 1 Plan, based on the tithe map of 1846, showing the location of the hoard in relation to the medieval town and trackway. Inset map shows the locations of the 1972 and 1990 hoards in relation to the known and probable medieval routeways.

'four feet' (1.2m), well below the depth of the original burial. No further work proved possible.

Discussion

According to Mr Mintey the two pots had been buried side by side with the larger vessel slightly to the north-west of the smaller. There seems no reason to believe that they were not buried contemporaneously. The reason for the extraordinary depth of the final excavation rests in the nature of the surrounding clay which had developed deep fissures into which many coins had fallen. This elasticity of the surrounding subsoil, together with the weight of the coins themselves, probably accounts for the shattered state of the two vessels. The finder reports that the coins were 'stacked on edge inside the pots, forming layers of concentric circles. As a result they were packed together very tightly (in many cases stuck together) and had to be very delicately prised out'. There appeared to be no significant grouping of the gold coins which were distributed throughout the hoard. Apart from the hoard and its containers nothing else was found save for a frond of bracken found beneath a cluster of coins.

Each jug was broken into over one hundred sherds and has now been reassembled, though some sherds from the bodies of both jugs are missing and may have been overlooked despite diligent searching. In addition, most of the rim and neck of jug 1 is absent and it is clear that the break is not recent. The effects of burial in this clay had also resulted in some erosion of the surfaces of the sherds and in particular of the edges of the fractures, which hindered restoration. A considerable area of the glaze on jug 2 has gone.

The findspot

This section is based on the introduction by Dennis Turner in the sale catalogue (Turner 1992). The hoard had been buried some 0.75km north of the medieval town and about 60m east of a derelict hollow way which borders the west side of the field containing the hoard. This routeway left the town along the line of Nutley Lane and can still be seen north of the findspot, curving east through private gardens before it ascends the face of Colley Hill (formerly Kingston Hill), again as a hollow way, and crosses Walton Heath in the direction of Kingston. The 1846 tithe map (fig 1) shows this track as a strip of woodland, which may suggest that this route had been abandoned at an earlier date to be replaced by the route further east. This leaves the town by London Road.

The findspot lies between lands known in medieval times as 'the Brokes' and 'London Lands'. The former has given its name to Brokes Road which borders the field to the north. The Brokes was apparently held by Reigate Priory and its north side was bounded by what was later known as 'Crabtree Bottom', the lane that ran directly along the bottom of the scarp slope of the Downs. London Lands was a freeholding which took its name from Roger of London, an earlier tenant, and extended southward as far as London Lane (now London Road, the A217) hard by Reigate Castle. The position of the boundary between these holdings is not known and it is possible that the hoard was placed in woodland between the two farms.

The pottery containers, by Clive Orton (fig 2)

JUG 1

Pitcher or large jug in buff fabric with pink margins and light grey core. Abundant inclusions of rounded clear, red and grey quartz, badly-sorted and up to over 1mm in size; also occasional very fine mica and coarse flint, ironstone and organic inclusions. Wheel-thrown,

with an unusually thin body for the size of vessel. Unglazed except for a patch resulting from contact with a glazed vessel in firing. Traces of a surface coating which has mostly been removed. The only decoration consists of three horizontal grooves around the shoulder. The rim is squared and may have had a pouring lip (the relevant part is missing). The base is

slightly kicked, with traces of burning opposite the handle. Strap handle, attached at the lower end by a large thumb impression.

Discussion

This vessel belongs to the Surrey White Ware tradition, but not to any of the known kilns, ie Cheam, Kingston or the 'Coarse Border Ware' industry (Pearce & Vince 1988). A source in east Surrey or the extreme west of Kent seems most likely. The form is reminiscent of the 'rounded jugs' from Cheam (Pearce & Vince 1988, nos 552-5) dated to the late 14th to mid-15th century, but is more like the pitchers of the succeeding Tudor Brown tradition, with kilns known at Cheam (Orton 1982), Kingston (Nelson 1981) and Woolwich (Pryor & Blockley 1978). The rim, handle and attachment, and decoration can all be matched at one or more of these sources, but pitchers from them appear to have sagging rather than kicked bases. Kicked bases are more typical of the late phase of the Surrey White Ware tradition (eg at Cheam). The vessel is likely to date to within a generation either side of the start of the Tudor Brown industry. Using the conventional date of c1480 for that event would date this vessel to the second half of the 15th century.

JUG 2

Small jug in off-white fabric. Abundant inclusions of very fine greyish quartz. Wheel-thrown with a thin body. The upper part of the exterior, from the rim to just below the girth, is covered with a uniform green glaze, which has run down to the base at one point; there are patches and spots over the rim and on the interior of the base. There is a slight cordon at the base of the neck. The rim is flat-topped, with a small

pinched pouring lip. The neck is straight, the body globular and the base slightly kicked. There is a narrow strap handle, the lower end of which has been smeared across the lower part of the body. There are several flaws resulting from the firing:

- (i) four contact scars around the girth and one on the base
- (ii) a large dent, probably from the base of another vessel, just above the girth
- (iii) small pieces of superfluous clay adhering to the base (interior and exterior), rim and lip

The overall effect is of a careless finish to an otherwise well-made and well-glazed pot.

Discussion

Despite the relative coarseness of the fabric this vessel belongs to the Tudor Green aspect of the Surrey White Ware tradition (Hurst 1964; Holling 1977; Moorhouse 1979; Pearce 1992). The form cannot be readily matched in the standard type series (Brears 1971; Mathews & Green 1969; Pearce 1992), fitting neither the 'tall jug' nor the 'squat jug' (Brears' types 1 and 2) nor Pearce's 'rounded drinking jug' or 'globular drinking jug' (Pearce 1992, 24-6). It can perhaps best be seen as a squat example of Pearce's rounded drinking jug form as it has the pouring lip typical of that form, but does not have the foot ring of the globular type. Despite its name, Tudor Green Ware started as early as c1400 (Moorhouse 1979, 59); this example seems to be earlier than the early 16th century assemblages from London (Pearce 1992, 89-91) and a 15th century date may be suggested. The poor finish of what is essentially a 'quality' product suggests that this vessel may be a second.

As a pair, both vessels can be dated to the second half of the 15th century – strongly supported by the latest coin dates in the associated hoard (1454-60). Paradoxically the coarser vessel can probably be dated more closely than the finer, mainly because complete profiles of 15th century examples of Tudor Green Ware are rare – known profiles are of the 16th and 17th centuries. The vessels help fill gaps at the very end of the local medieval tradition from medieval to post-medieval pottery.

Both jugs are now in the care of Guildford Museum (Acc No RB 3940).

Concluding comments

With a find of this nature it becomes possible to invent almost any set of circumstances to account for its deposition and this trap will not be entered here. A number of bald facts do, however, stand out and offer themselves to a loose, and it is to be hoped, not too speculative interpretation. Turner (1992) has already given an account of the historical background of upheaval in the mid-15th century against which this huge hoard, and the nearby 1972 hoard which is of similar date, may be seen. It may be worth noting that the two jugs considered here scarcely seem satisfactory containers for such a weight of coinage. The actual weight is not known; the theoretical weight would be about 21.5kg, less perhaps 10% if wear is taken into account. I am grateful to Roger Mintey for this calculation. Jug 2 in particular is a very fragile vessel which if packed to capacity could hardly be suited to long distance travel, and

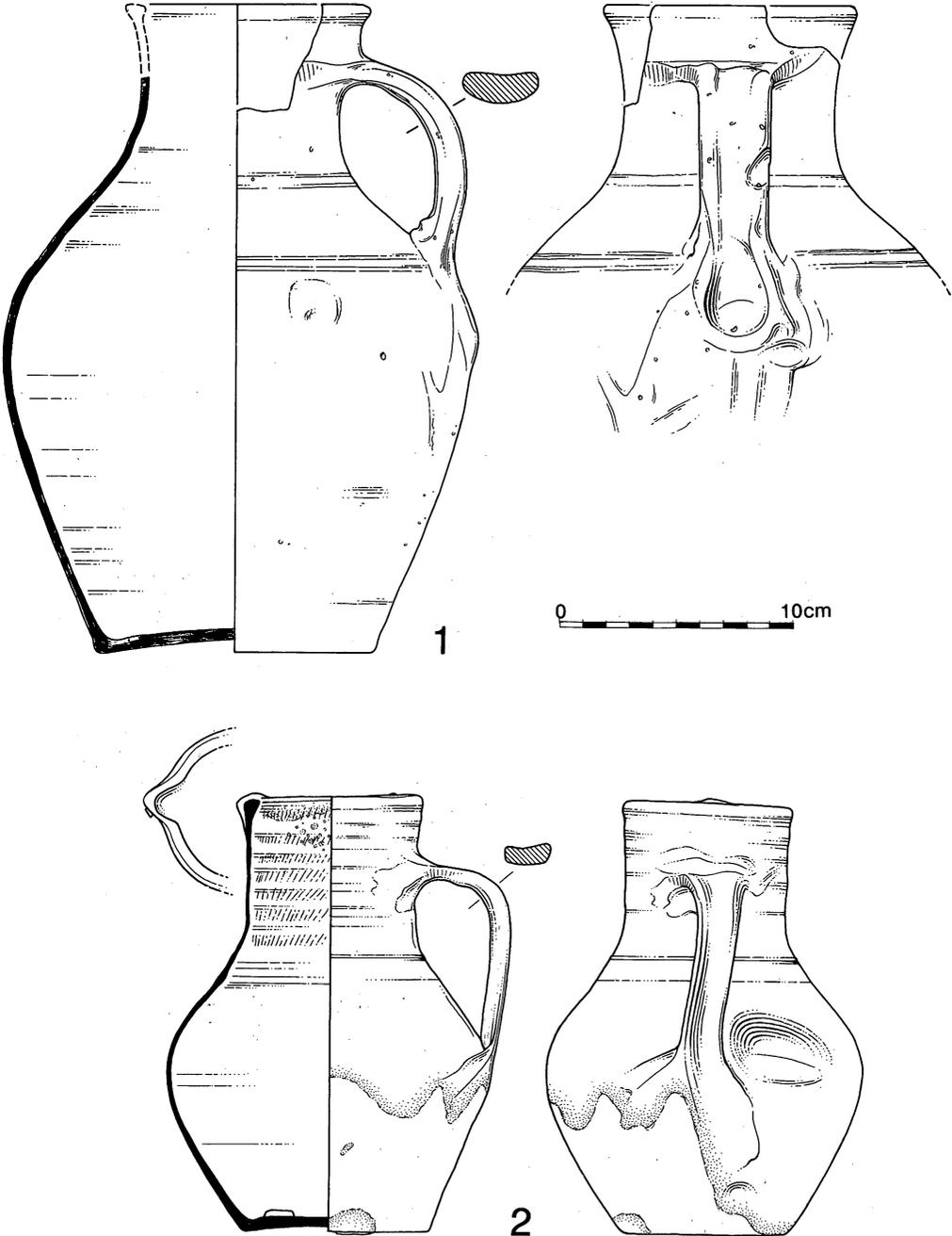


Fig 2 The pottery containers (1:3)

would be unlikely to be recovered intact. It may be wondered then why a cloth, leather or wooden receptacle was not used unless prompt recovery was not intended. It seems likely that the concealer (one individual is assumed) had not travelled far and may have come from Reigate itself rather than hiding the hoard before reaching the town from the north. Some useful digging tool would also need to have been carried as the evidence suggests that the hoard seemed deeply buried and the clay must have made the task hard going. This apparent depth of the hoard and the difficulty too of penetrating the Gault Clay suggest some preparedness. While the findspot was of an open aspect at the time of the hoard's discovery, it seems reasonable to conclude that the site may have been woodland at the time of burial. This would have provided cover for the concealer, who would surely have been engaged in his work for some time. The missing fragments of the upper part of jug 1 could have been lost due to tree removal. Beyond this the evidence is silent.

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